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Support for Continued Funding of Regional Energy Innovation Clusters in EPIC 5

My name is Tanya Barham, and I am the CEO at Community Energy Labs, a climate tech company working at the intersection of machine learning, systems integration, and hardware-enabled building energy solutions.

I am writing to strongly encourage the California Energy Commission to continue funding Regional Energy Innovation Clusters, or REICs, in the EPIC 5 Investment Plan. Starting and succeeding as an ML, integration, or hardware climate tech company is extremely difficult. It takes a village to raise a company, and California's REIC ecosystem has supported Community Energy Labs at nearly every step of our journey.

New Energy Nexus provided invaluable early support through its curriculum and Clean Tech Open programming. That support was vital in helping us solidify core business fundamentals, including carbon impact analysis, in-depth customer validation, market assessment, and technoeconomic feasibility. We then moved into a second phase of development, where CEC funding through New Energy Nexus contributed to critical support for prototyping our innovation, both technical and workforce-related.

We worked with New Energy Nexus again through CalTestBed to conduct measurement and verification that validated the feasibility of our solution and quantified its impact. That work became strong enough that we were able to publish the results in the peer-reviewed journal *Energy and Buildings*. This gave us the technical credibility we needed to move into paid pilots and early commercialization, and it helped us secure more than \$2 million in SAFE note investment.

SCEIN then provided critical hiring and business support resources, including access to a proposal writer who helped us land our first paid pilots. Many of those pilots have since contributed to more than \$1 million in annual recurring revenue. That maturation also positioned us to apply for and receive early commercialization support through the CEC BRIDGE program, where we leveraged our contract revenue and investor traction to enter the market.

There is also something intangible, but essential, about these incubation pathways. The community of innovators, advisors, and supporters that surrounds REIC programs is often what helps founders survive the inevitable lows of building a climate tech company. Beyond technical and business support, people I met through these accelerators helped me personally, and helped Community Energy Labs more broadly, navigate existential market threats, complicated hiring and equity decisions, and many other perils of startup life.

Today, Community Energy Labs continues to maintain an active and growing California payroll, helping solidify California's reputation as a great place to build climate technology companies, do business, and create high-quality jobs.

For companies like ours, REICs are not abstract programs. They are the connective tissue that helps early-stage technologies move from concept to validation, from validation to pilots, from pilots to commercialization, and from commercialization to meaningful economic and climate impact. We hope the CEC will continue to fund REICs in EPIC 5 and continue nurturing the early-stage pipeline that helps make California an economic powerhouse in clean technology.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued leadership in advancing California's clean energy innovation ecosystem.